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We offer :

**COLLECTION  
OF 650 MEDICAL MANUSCRIPTS  
FROM 1635-1791**

**ARCHIVES  
OF THE MEDICAL FAMILY  
WEPFER**

OF SCHAFFHAUSEN IN SWITZERLAND.

AN UNIQUE MANUSCRIPT - COLLECTION OF 650 LETTERS  
AND OTHER MANUSCRIPTS OF HIGHEST MEDICAL INTEREST  
FROM THE YEARS 1635-1791.

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**I**N the centre of the archives stands the imposing figure of

**JOHANN JACOB WEPFER**

*physician of the town of Schaffhausen.*

1620-1791.

He was a medical man, who on account of his attainments in medical practice as well as of his human qualities, enjoyed already in his lifetime an uncontested fame far over the borders of his Swiss country; a man, whose scientific efforts have found their due approbation also in the professional posterity.

Johann Jacob Wepfer having pursued his studies assiduously in course of ten years on the medical high schools of Italy, Basel and Strassburg, was one of the first who recognized clearly the signs of the new time; a man, who interceded on behalf of Harveys doctrine of the circulation of the blood, (see Wepfers doctors disputation 1647 Basel: De palpitatione cordis, and the treatise 1658 Schaffhausen: Observationes eorum, quos sustulit apoplexia); a man, who incessantly requested, that medicine,

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of necessity, has to be taught and learned in intimate relationship with surgery and chemistry ; a man, who in every way, set his word against superstition and unscientific speculation.—We mention of his works, besides the discours : *De palpitazione cordis*, and the treatise : *De apoplexia*, which we quoted above, the discourses : *De thermarum potu* and *Cicutae aquaticae historia et noxae* ; *Historia anatomica de puella sine cerebro* ; *Observationes nempe medico-practicas de affectibus capitis internis et externis*, and the numerous shorter essays, which are enumerated with exact titles by : Brunner Muralt, « Aus den Briefen hervorragender Schweizer Aerzte des 17. Jahrhunderts ». Basel 1919. There are mentioned also the papers published by him in the « *Ephemerides* », the organ of the « *Academia Caesarea Leopoldina* », of which he became member, under the honorary name : Machaon III.—High and low asked for his assistance by word and deed in boundless confidence. (He was physician in ordinary to the duke of Würtemberg, the margrave of Durlach and the elector Palatine ; in one letter he is said to have been called in vain by Louis XIV of France). A circle of young medicine pioneers and investigators was formed around his venerable presence, giving in its totality and continuity to the town of Schaffhausen for some time the signification of a scientific centre.—Two of his sons were medical practitioners, of which Johann Conrad as his father's lifelong assistant is in these archives of special importance ; likewise two grandsons were medical practitioners, Bernhard and Georg Michael, who published the grandfathers works. His son in law was Johann Conrad Brunner, the famous anatomist of the university Heidelberg ; another promising disciple was Johann Conrad Peyer. Names as Stokar, Pfister, Spleiss from Schaffhausen, Harder, I. C. Baubinus, Sereta, Segher, Plater from Basel, the Strassburgian anatomist Sebiz, the French Duvernois, the Swiss Schobinger with the famous midwife of the same name (the Madame Bourgeois of Helvetia), and from the court and university circle of Würtem-

berg, Baden and Palatine the doctores Scherpf, Gmelin and Camerarius; that are names having generally vanished from the sight of posterity, but which are kept in the full knowledge of the medical history, and whose works are to be found still today in the great private and public libraries of medical history. The holders of those names, as far as they are not represented by own letters or letters to their address, are acting indirectly in the archives such a part, that really they could not be unmentioned in this place.

**T**he stock of the archives is formed by the correspondence of 136 letters from 1676-1693 between father and son, which begins 1676 with two letters by the student Johann Conrad Wepfer at Leyden and ends January 1695 a few days before the father Johann Jacob Wepfer died. The greatest part of it—except the two letters from Leyden—deal with the common practice of father and son at Schaffhausen and in South Germany, so that, when one of both had to be far off from the town, they communicated each other about the clientel at home and abroad. To these 70 letters by the father and 67 by the son, there are added nearly 200 casuistical communications of the years 1653-1693 prevalently by the father Johann Jacob Wepfer, courses of illness and prescriptions, which latter in the still today usual longish form.—The letters contain not only answers to questions about interpretation and attendance of difficult and interesting cases of practice, beyond it they expatiate on the most various clinical, pathological-anatomical and physical curiosities. They allow not only a general insight into the whole medical situation of their time, there follows rather from the courses of illness, noted with great conscientiousness and partly remarkable extensiveness (until 17 narrow inscribed 4to pages), and composed consultations and prescriptions, which bear in many kinds the names of the patients and are written throughout in Latin,—



a quite specialised orientation on the practice manners and customs of those days, representing a really exceptionally advantage to the medico-historical investigation. From the previously mentioned clinical observations and anatomical pathological correlations, which originate from the years 1653-1693 and accompany consequently nearly the whole career of Johann Jacob Wepfer, there may be noticed as follows: *Vomica pulmonis*; *Colica piliosa in Paresi istante*; *Nephritis in symptomatibus hypochondriacis*; *Cardialgia*; *Affectio hypochondriacum foliae praeludiis*; *Hydropis metus*; *Paresis post colicam biliosam recidiva*; *Colica biliosa cum epilepsia periodica*; *Colica biliosa cum reliquis aliquot symptomatorum imprimis fungi pedis dextri*; *Intestinorum haemorrhagia*; *Vomitus*; *Tumor veluti fungosius humeri seu axillae*; *Vertigo*; *Melancholia*; *Colica*; *Abortus*; *Tibiarum dolor ingens*; *Fistula ani etc. etc.*

The greatest part of the archives—in numbers—is taken by letters written to father and son by other persons. There are letters to Johann Jacob Wepfer until 1650 from the friends still studying at the university of Basel and Strassburg; an animated exchange of experiences and books and instruments is the frequent motive for these communications. There are letters from the physicians in ordinary from Stuttgart, Heidelberg, Durlach etc., referring to the health of the princely patients. There are letters by patients and people who consult the Wepfers. The names of these letter-writers being without importance, the multiplicity of the cases is extremely instructive, and, at last, of human and cultural importance having the whole charme of immediateness. A roll of them of 36 letters originates from a practitioner Dr. Caspar Müller from Frauenfeld, little town two hours from Schaffhausen, whose name of course is not known by science history, but whose letters are of penetrative signification in medical reference as well as for the figure of his ardently venerated master as for the characterisation of the whole time; that time, which has been loaded in an unimaginable manner

by aggravation through imperfect means of communication, by interception through superstition of the contemporaries,—it was only by strain, and for the first time at Schaffhausen, that Wepfer got the permission to dissect dead bodies—by absence of the simplest anatomical knowledge of the surgeon and by the insufficiency of remedies and instruments ; to get a catheter, which was wanted and which at last, arrived to late, to the patients detriment, there are letters written over and over again.

**T**HE second principal figure of the archives is the mentioned

### JOHANN CONRAD WEPFER

the son, born at Schaffhausen 1657, who did not attain close on his fathers importance, but who—especially in these archives—merites attention as the permanent assistant of his famous father and as true reflexion of his nature and work. Besides 70 letters to the father and a good deal of the communications, he probably wrote the roll of students note-books—positively we know only, that 1676 he went to university at Leyden—where among others there is a note-book entitled : *Experimenta collegio physico-geographica curiosa ab Exc. D. Hofmann istituta*, probably from the anatomist and botanist Moritz Hofmann at Altdorf, who variously is mentioned in the archives. There is also registered his appointment as physician of the town of Schaffhausen 1702.

The third generation of the archives meets us by the grandson

### GEORG MICHAEL WEPFER

who left the school of Schaffhausen in 1714, as is to be seen per his actual certificat, and who in the same year sits already on the feet of Boerhaave at Leyden, where now he is taught by this investigator of world-wide fame about the importance of chemistry, which for grand father and father in their smaller circle worked with all their might since half a century.



The very clean written students note-book is entitled :

**BOERHAAVII COLLEGIUM CHYMIAE.**

The course is divided in three parts : I. *Historia chymiae*. II. *Observationes generales*, quas experientia invenit et ad ratiocinium mechanicum demonstravit. III. *Correctio experimentorum fidelis*, eorumque demonstratio, in qua experimenta operationum chemicarum habebuntur explicata, idemque modis hisce sequentibus. Part I deals with Geber, Rhiphaeus, Lullus, Paracelsus, Helmont etc. There are described the metals ; Aurum. Argentum vivum, (on which Boerhaave later on wrote an extensive treatise). Part II. Here is applied also to chemistry the principle *De usu ratiocinii mecanici*, which Boerhaave had laid down for medicine already in his sensational discourse of 1703. « Boerhaave prouve, que c'est par la chimie qu'il faut corriger les erreurs ». (Bayle II, 139 ff.). Part III. Is illustrated by little drawings. The note-book consists of 97 quarto pages and is of absolute authenticity, as Boerhaave notoriously red off his chemistry courses in contradistinction to his other courses. This students note-book forms a first step to the latter works of this most celebrated chemist of the 17th century, particularly to his « *Elementa chemiae* » (Leyden 1732) the best book on the subject all through the eighteenth century » (Garrison p. 320), and is consequently of really highest medico-historical interest.—The letters addressed to Georg Michael Wepfer from the time of his latter period, when he was practitioner at Schaffhausen, are—in numbers—much less than those addressed to the grandfather and the father, but come up until 1776.

**M**ORE than 10 documents (not letters) complete the archives. The first a police regulation of the year 1635 from Schaffhausen refering to obsequies and streets cleaning in times of conta-

gious illnesses etc. ; the last from 1791, when the widow of Georg Michael, « in old age » still living at Schaffhausen, claims an outstanding (fee?) debet. Of further documents we mention : Proposition of chemists inspection ; fees for treatment of the « Stift St. Blasien » ; dedication from gratitude of a pew with right of use ; regulations for plague-stricken districts from 1698 (not from Schaffhausen or Wepfers) and among other documents the marriage settlement from 1650 between Johann Jacob Wepfer, the grandfather, and the Swiss patrician Barbara Ringk von Wildenburg, a very copious document of extreme interest relating to the history of culture, where, as to many other objects, also to the « medical things » of the bridegroom is accorded a special hereditary and matrimonial treatment.

In the background of the archives there are the Palatine wars of Louis XIV of France, famous by their horrors. There is hardly a letter of the years 1689-1692, which doesn't express in a highly affecting manner the afflictions of those days. Johann Jacob Wepfer himself as physician in ordinary of his belligerent masters was drawn most closely in the war accidents, and also the friends circle had to suffer as well in South-Germany as in Switzerland, which, in those days, has not at all been spared from encounters and religious strifes.

The scientific property left by Johann Jacob Wepfer, that means his library and his correspondences have been bought in 1774 by the university of Leyden for 400 gold florins, certainly a forcible argument for the great esteem, which also posterity paid to the works done by this grand medical man, whom they call the « Hippocrates of Helvetia ». The biographers Brunner and Muralt, who have written the last and most ample essay about Wepfer, do not know by autopsy but the correspondence with Muralt contained today in private property, while they qualify the correspondence with Brunner as undiscoverable. They quote as places, where documents relating to the medical history of that Schaffhausen period are to be found : The public



records of Zürich, the universities of Basel, Bern, Leyden and Heidelberg, and the Vadiana at St. Gallen. Our archives are forming consequently a quite essential contribution to the known material of the medical history of 1650-1750, as well as of the imposing figure of Johann Jacob Wepfer, especially because the hitherto unknown correspondence with the son,—who at once, as we showed, was the permanent assistant and special friend of his father—allows an insight of more intensus and more intimate kind, as the correspondences with the other friends and foreigners of course could ever give.

**T**HE letters and other documents are throughout in very good state of preservation. The greatest part is written by well legible hand and partly—as for instance the Boerhaave note-book—on finest white paper. The correspondence between father and son is always on paper of the same size and of this reason especially well preserved.

In opposition to other «printed» documents of those days, which in their stilted manner don't settle but very little of living impressions, those documents dwell immediate vigour, so that you may see before you as alive the medical man holding intercourse with his patients, disciples and colleagues.

Rarely there will be found in any great library such unbroken medical archives, which, so complete in themselves, have to be quoted as a very

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